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*Box 0006*

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

26 June 1986

The Philippines: Implications of Continuing  
Pro-Marcos Demonstrations [redacted]

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Summary

Persistent demonstrations by supporters of former President Marcos are aggravating tensions between right-wing and left-leaning advisers in President Aquino's cabinet. The loyalists undoubtedly hope to precipitate a split in the coalition that will either tempt Defense Minister Enrile to try to seize power or prompt Aquino to force Enrile out of the cabinet. Although the demonstrations do not pose a serious threat to political stability, we believe they could make an early casualty of Enrile and in any case underscore Aquino's political vulnerability in the absence of constitutional and legal safeguards to her authority. [redacted]

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Factors at Play

In the four months since President Aquino took office, supporters of former President Marcos have organized numerous, widely publicized protests in Manila. Although relatively small--ranging from several hundred to 10,000 people, according to press reports--the mood of the demonstrations has deteriorated from peaceful protests in city parks to angry demonstrations near the US Embassy, attempts to march on the presidential palace, and rallies in front of the headquarters of the Armed Forces--the site of the "peoples revolution" last February. In addition, several rallies this month have turned violent, with police

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Office of  
East Asian Analysis, Southeast Asia Division, Islands Branch.  
Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to  
Chief, Southeast Asia Division, OEA [redacted]

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having to use tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds.

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We believe the goal of the demonstrators is to increase tensions between right-wing military advisers in the cabinet and left-leaning presidential confidants.

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Marcos loyalists have recently begun voicing support for Defense Minister Enrile during rallies. At the same time, the loyalists have begun a disinformation campaign against Enrile--including rumors that he is planning to overthrow Aquino and install Marcos's running-mate, Arturo Tolentino, as president--in an effort to alienate the cabinet from Enrile.

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The loyalist's efforts to divide the coalition have met with some success. The US Embassy says that suspicions between Aquino and Enrile are running high and each is maneuvering to ensure victory in the event of a showdown. For his part, Enrile has stepped up efforts to buttress his powerbases in the military and among Aquino's political opposition.

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Similarly, Aquino continues isolating Enrile from military decisionmaking and trying to diminish his political and financial resources. According to the Embassy, for example, Aquino recently vetoed a list of suggested officer promotions submitted by Enrile and made her own selections to demonstrate her control of the military. In addition, a close presidential adviser told the Embassy that some of Aquino's advisers are attempting to use evidence of financial and military irregularities committed when the Defense Minister served under Marcos in order to reduce Enrile's control over several lucrative and politically powerful businesses.

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### The Government's View

In response to the increasingly confrontational tone of the demonstrators, the government is taking a harder line and has ordered the military to arrest anyone demonstrating without a permit. If vigorously implemented, such a policy would signal a decided shift from the government's earlier decision to exercise a policy of "maximum tolerance" with pro-Marcos demonstrators.

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The government's decision probably stems in part from the perception among Aquino and her advisers that Marcos and close personal associates such as industrial magnate Eduardo Cojuangco are orchestrating and even financing the demonstrations.

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[redacted]

Aquino probably also is concerned that loyalists will continue demonstrating in an effort to discredit the government and generate momentum for her opposition when local and national elections are held--possibly by November. [redacted]

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[redacted] members of Marcos's former party have better funding for the upcoming campaign than Aquino's supporters--a circumstance that we believe assures the demonstrations will continue. [redacted]

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### Looking Ahead

In our judgment, the number of pro-Marcos demonstrations will grow in the months ahead as the government prepares for ratifying a new constitution and holding local and national elections. One issue that the loyalists might use to intensify strains in the cabinet is the government's effort to negotiate a cease-fire with Communist insurgents. Military advisers have little faith in cease-fire efforts and, [redacted] [redacted] have clashed repeatedly with left-leaning advisers who have been the strongest proponents of negotiations with the insurgents. [redacted]

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Although we judge that the demonstrations will continue to increase tensions within the coalition, we believe they are not likely to pose a serious threat to stability. For one thing, there have been none reported outside of Manila. In addition, the Embassy says that the number of demonstrations has not increased substantially in recent weeks and that the rallies rarely attract spontaneous participants. This is probably due in part to the perception in Manila that Marcos--in financing the demonstrations to make trouble for the government--is acting the part of a "sore loser." But we believe the limited enthusiasm for the rallies is in greater part because of the fact that Aquino continues to enjoy widespread popular support. Nonetheless, there is always the danger that growing disillusionment with Aquino's government could swell the ranks of pro-Marcos demonstrations. [redacted]

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A "get tough" policy, nevertheless, could have considerable political cost for Aquino. Critics are already accusing the new government of indulging in the authoritarian tactics of the Marcos era, and clashes between protestors and the military would almost certainly be used to support that contention. In addition, the demonstrations stand as reminders that "people power"--the public outpouring of support for Aquino during the rebellion--is a volatile and unpredictable dynamic that could easily turn against the government if it fails to cope with the country's pressing problems. [redacted]

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